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FAMILY COUNCILS PROMOTE HOME COOPERATION

An interview between Mrs. Mary Armstrong, home demonstration agent, Camden, New Jersey, Mrs. R. C. Reeve, Camden, New Jersey, and Mrs. W. C. Davis, Haddon Heights, New Jersey, delivered in the home demonstration radio program November 7, 1934, and broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations.

ARMSTRONG:

Good afternoon, friends of the radio audience.

Taking part with me today, in the discussion of Family Councils, are two New Jersey homemakers and parents - Mrs. Wm. C. Davis of Haddon Heights and Mrs. R. C. Reeve of Camden.

Mrs. Davis, from your experience with many parents, what do you think about the need for family councils?

DAVIS:

It is surprising how many trivial things can cause much concern.

I have found this true in my own experience as well as from my contact with other parents. Simple everyday matters often constitute real problems. But with the help of a family council such things can usually be settled agreeably to all concerned.

ARMSTRONG:

Have you held family councils in your own home, Mrs. Davis?

DAVIS:

I think my answer to that depends upon our interpretation of the term. We feel that we have followed the council plan in our own way. Do councils necessarily have to be formal with all the family members meeting about a table at stated times?

ARMSTRONG:

No, I think not. I remember only one authority who believes in a formal plan like a family "Town meeting". I believe our parent education specialist, Mrs. McDowell, feels there is danger of too much formality. Decisions often need to be made when a question arises and cannot wait until a meeting is held.

Mrs. Reeve, what do you think about family councils?

REEVE:

Tell, I would first like to ask, Mrs. Armstrong, just how you would express the general idea of the family council?

ARMSTRONG:

I like to think of it simply as a mutual consideration of each others' interests and a sharing in making decisions.

(over)

REEVE:

Don't you think that the idea can be carried out most successfully where there are several children?

ARMSTRONG:

Yes, because there is apt to be a greater need for cooperation in a large family.

DAVIS:

I've always felt that helping make decisions was valuable with older children, but do you think it practical where there are only small children in the family?

ARMSTRONG:

Yes, to a certain extent. One mother I know, Mrs. Sinclair, found that allowing her children of eight and nine years to share in the plans were really an advantage to all.

DAVIS:

Just what sort of plans?

ARMSTRONG:

Mrs. Sinclair belonged to several clubs including a child study group which met in the afternoon. The children always felt very badly to find her away after school and sometimes cried until she reached home. She devised the scheme of using the blackboard in the playroom for a postoffice. On the days she was to be away, she wrote notes on it for them to read and answer when they came in to lunch. A note might say "I am going to be at Mrs. Horner's for a meeting this afternoon and will be through about four o'clock. Do you and Franklin want to play at home or walk up there to meet me?" The children would discuss it and Adelaide, the older would write an answer. Whatever their decision there was no after school disappointment.

DAVIS:

I can see where that might be good training in other ways, too.

ARMSTRONG:

Yes, Mrs. Sinclair discovered that. She can be sure of a carefully written memorandum of telephone messages or of her daughter's own plans.

REEVE:

In what other ways do you think a family council is valuable, Mrs. Armstrong?

ARMSTRONG:

I think both you and Mrs. Davis can answer that from your own experiences, Mrs. Reeve. Wouldn't you like to tell us about your use of ballots at home?

Voting is surely a device of the council.

REEVE:

We often vote by closed ballot on plans for family outings. Each person puts a suggestion in the ballot box early in the week. Since my husband has been at home on Saturday during the last year we have always looked forward to our Saturday recreation together.

ARMSTRONG:

How old are your daughters, Mrs. Reeve?

REEVE:

Jane is twelve, but Eleanor is quite grown up. Eleanor and I are apt to want to do the same things. Frequently, therefore, we three adults make a point of suggesting something that Jane would especially enjoy. However, when the majority vote is for something else, she is perfectly satisfied.

ARMSTRONG:

Are the children included in discussions about money?

REEVE:

We always talk everything over frankly since we feel that even a girl of twelve should know that the family pocketbook has limits. It happens right now that we have a salary check twice a month and when we do our marketing we plan to buy staples to last two weeks. Jane goes with us and it is one of her home duties to check on all supplies so that we know what to order.

ARMSTRONG:

Many mothers find it difficult to keep cookies and crackers on hand without denying the children the privilege of treating friends. Has your method worked here?

REEVE:

Yes, it has. Jane has always liked to pass cookies or crackers to her little friends who come home with her. Sometimes after she had held open house I would come home to find no cookies for afternoon tea and no saltines for dinner. Now, Jane looks carefully to see that the supply will last until the next shopping day before she treats.

DAVIS:

If Jane wanted something you could not afford would her share in family plans bring the same cooperation?

REEVE:

Yes, she has been splendid about a bicycle she has wanted for more than a year.

ARMSTRONG:

Children often make unreasonable demands not because they are selfish but because they don't understand the situation. That gives us another illustration of the value of the council idea doesn't it, Mrs. Reeve?

REEVE:

Yes, and I realize now that we have followed the plan without calling it a family council.

Do you think it works as well with boys as with girls?

ARMSTRONG:

Well, Mrs. Davis has two sons as well as a daughter. Perhaps discussion concerning family income or personal allowance has proved valuable in your family, Mrs. Davis.

DAVIS:

It certainly has meant a great deal. Before my younger son left for college this fall he prepared a budget of the whole year's expenses and listed the exact amount which his father was to send him each month. He had last year's records, together with the budget in the college catalogue, to go on, and knew we would approve a just amount.

ARMSTRONG:

That was fine wasn't it, and a good experience for your son, too. What methods have you used to secure their cooperation in other matters, Mrs. Davis?

DAVIS:

In most cases of difficulty, getting out point of view helped them to be cooperative. This was true with our sons as well as our daughter. Whether it was being late for dinner or wanting to go out study nights, talking things over solved the problem.

ARMSTRONG:

Was it the boys who were late for dinner? It sounds like another case of football practice.

DAVIS:

Yes, that was it. The first time Bill stayed late to practice we waited dinner. The younger children were fussy and quarrelsome, their father was impatient, dinner was spoiled and I was worn out with the strain.

ARMSTRONG:

It has hard on Bill, too, wasn't it - trying to conform to two different programs?

DAVIS:

Yes. We held a real family council, this time not at the dinner table though, and with suggestions from everyone worked out a plan agreeable to all. After that Bill came home to a calm family who had eaten dinner and were settled for the evening. His dinner had been kept warm in the oven. He ate it alone in the kitchen, washed his dishes and went to his room to study.

ARMSTRONG:

But, Mrs. Davis you spoke of the children wanting to go out to parties on study nights. Did the council plan help there?

DAVIS: Yes, We were concerned with the question of how much physical strain and lost sleep Harriet could stand for the sake of excitement. She was concerned with how many invitations and good times she could refuse without being unpopular. If she was allowed to go to Jane's party on Monday, she wanted all the more to go to Mary's on Thursday. That "Mary would be mad" was very important to her. This situation was the inspiration for a real cooperative consideration of the relative importance of school work, health, and recreation. After that Harriet usually made her own decision about going out through the week. Making a careful choice of what was worthwhile helped her to develop good judgment. We often wished, however, that other parents followed some plan.

ARMSTRONG:

The family council idea could well be extended to a council plan including parents whose children were intimate. It would be much easier for one family if others in the neighborhood followed the same schedule.

DAVIS:

Our time is almost up, Mrs. Armstrong, won't you review the advantages we have mentioned of the council plan.

ARMSTRONG:

From experiences in their own homes, Mrs. Reeve and Mrs. Davis have shown us that family councils promote home cooperation in respect to individual satisfactions, home duties, meal schedules, special requests, children's responsibilities, money matters and family leisure.

I hope some other parents have received some helpful suggestions.

Good afternoon.

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